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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000536

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PTER PREL PGOV BG BG

SUBJECT: A/S ROCCA'S MEETING WITH JAMAAT ISLAMI CHIEF

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, Reason(s): 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: JI amir Nizami told A/S Rocca that JMB has "no support anywhere in the country" and that the BDG has destroyed JMB's field activists. He denied any ties between JI and JMB, declared the next elections will be free and fair, and lobbied for closer US/BDG relations. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On January 27, SCA Assistant Secretary Rocca, CDA, and poloff (notetaker) met with Jamaat Islami (JI) Amir Motiur Rahman Nizami. JI Senior Assistant Secretary General Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, Assistant Secretary General Abdur Razzaq, and control officer were also present.

¶3. (C) In response to A/S Rocca's expression of concern over the upcoming elections and the rise in extremist violence, Nizami said that the BDG has taken serious action against extremism. In a short period of time, he said, the BDG has destroyed the network of Jamaat ulMujahideen (JMB), and that while JMB may be tough to eliminate, their field activists have been destroyed and are unable to launch new attacks. He added that religious leaders throughout Bangladesh have publicly rejected extremism, that no group would "dare launch activities in the name of Islam," and that JMB has no support anywhere in the country. He said that the real harm is being done by leftist groups who have killed 3,000 people since independence, and that JI supports democracy and rejects leftist ideology and violence.

¶4. (C) Nizami blamed reports of ties between JMB and JI on "unfortunate media" reporting. He asserted that:

- JI abides by the constitution and doesn't agree with JMB's activities;
- Reports about JMB's connection with JI's student wing, Shibir, are trying to create misunderstanding about JI;
- The Awami League (AL) has yet to prove any connection;
- Without JI's support, the BNP-led government could never have attacked JMB so vigorously;
- JI has repeatedly said that JMB bombings are perverted and misguided, and done by uneducated, unemployed youths; and
- JI repeated many times that suicide bombing is not a ticket to Heaven; rather, it's a path to hell.

¶5. (C) Razzaq added that JI engages in democracy and has done so throughout the nation's history, while JMB wants to impose Islam on the nation. Kamaruzzaman charged that JMB is more connected with the opposition Awami League since Mufti Hannan has a family tie to the AL and comes from the same district as Sheikh Hasina. The purpose of the bombings was to destabilize the BDG, he said.

¶6. (C) Asked about the elections, Nizami said that elections in 1973 and 1986 were not free or fair, but JI promoted the idea of caretaker governments, resulting in the last three elections being free and fair. (Note: JI, AL, and BNP all claim parentage of the caretaker system.) It's logical, he said, that this next election would be even more free and fair. There should not be any problems, he said, adding that the AL should come back to Parliament to raise their objections, and not resort to anarchy outside Parliament. In response to questions about the BNP/JI alliance, Nizami, Kamaruzzaman, and Razzaq all insisted that BNP/JI unity has been strengthened, and that the attempts to sow discord have failed. As for additional JI seats, "We will try for more," but he declined to provide a precise number.

¶7. (C) Nizami refuted statements "by our neighbors (read India) who write that Bangladesh is the "next Afghanistan." Calling it "media terrorism," he and Kamaruzzaman said that their neighbor wants to control the Bangladesh markets in garments and textiles. Nizami said that "we have found JMB's weapons, know their country of origin, and it is not a good thing" but we are helpless. He expressed concern over how their neighbor could send arms from outside the country, and appealed for assistance from the U.S. We want closer bilateral relations, he said. "Sometimes we see in the Washington Post, and other US papers, propaganda against Bangladesh citing us as dysfunctional." Instead of this "we need your help as friends."

¶8. (C) This message has been cleared by A/S Rocca.
CHAMMAS